

Message Text

PAGE 01 NATO 05638 161857Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L USNATO 5638

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, NATO, CA, GE, UR

SUBJ: CANADIAN VIEWS ON SOVIET LEADERSHIP

REF: MOSCOW 14549

1. AT OCTOBER 14 MEETING OF NATO POLITICAL COMMITTEE, CANADIAN POLAD (FOWELL), DRAWING ON OCTOBER 9 REPORT FROM CANADIAN EMBASSY MOSCOW, GAVE FOLLOWING PICTURE OF APPARENT HEALTH OF SOVIET LEADERSHIP BASED ON OBSERVATION OF SOVIET LEADERS AT EVENTS SURROUNDING HONECKER VISIT AND CEREMONIES MARKING 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF SOVIET ACADEMY OF SCIENCES. SOMEWHAT AT VARIANCE WITH IMPRESSION GAINED BY AMEMBASSY MOSCOW (REFTEL), CANADIANS THOUGHT BREZHNEV LOOKED UNWELL AT ABOVE FUNCTIONS AND THAT HIS DIFFICULTIES WITH PRONUNCIATION SEEMED QUITE MARKED. TV COVERAGE MAGNIFIED BREZHNEV'S SPEECH PROBLEM AND, TO CANADIANS, HE SEEMED UNDER STRAIN AS HE LISTENED TO LENGTHY HONECKER SPEECH. CANADIANS BELIEVE TV COVERAGE MAY RAISE QUESTIONS AMONG SOVIET CITIZENS ABOUT BREZHNEV'S ABILITY TO DEAL VIGOROUSLY WITH FOOD SHORTAGES SHOULD PROJECTED 40-45 MILLION TON GRAIN SHORTFALL DEVELOP.

2. CANADIAN EMBASSY, MOSCOW, FOUND COLLECTIVE IMPRESSION OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 NATO 05638 161857Z

POLITBURO ALSO STRIKING. PHOTOGRAPHS NORMALLY GIVE ONLY DECEPTIVE, DISTANT VIEW OF SOVIET LEADERS WHO, WHEN VIEWED CLOSE-UP EN MASSE, GIVE IMPRESSION OF GREAT AGE. MINISTERS LIKE KULAKOV AND POLYANSKY (DESPITE CURRENT BURDENS LATTER

BEARS AS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE) NOW IN THEIR LATE 50'S, LOOK
"POSITIVELY YOUTHFUL" ALONGSIDE BREZHNEV, KOSYGIN, PODGORNYY,
SUZLOV, ET AL.

3. IN CANADIAN VIEW, SPECULATION ABOUT HEALTH OF LEADERSHIP
AND BREZHNEV'S INTENTIONS FOLLOWING 25TH CPSU CONGRESS HAS
PROMPTED INTENSE JOCKEYING FOR POSITION AMONG BREZHNEV'S
POSSIBLE HEIRS. STREATOR

CONFIDENTIAL

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